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Excerpts from Die Liparischen Inseln

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Abstract

Filicuri, 9 km and 5463 are square, rises in the west at some distance from Salina. It is made up of a single cone 773. 71 metres high and presents various lateral elevations among which the most prominent is the small 173.57 high peninsular of Capu Grazianu to the southeast.

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Filicudi in the Late 19th Century

a Scientific Description

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University of Wollongong

Archduke Ludwig Salvator of Austria (Florence 1847 – Boleslav 1915), cousin of Emperor Franz Joseph I, was a 19th century traveller passionate about visiting and stimulating interest in Mediterranean locales that at the time were little known and rarely travelled. He lived for many years on the then largely unknown island of Majorca, buying up unimproved areas of land in order to preserve and enjoy them. He was concerned with the preservation of the natural beauty of the Balearic Islands and a keen observer and documenter of animals, plants, meteorology, history, folklore, architecture, landscape descriptions as well as the population, their customs, songs and poems. Between 1869 and 1897 he published his observations in the nine-volume book series Die Balearen.

A researcher and chronicler of the Mediterranean Sea, his quest for knowledge led him to travel widely on his steam yacht Nixe and towards the end of the 19th century he visited the Aeolian Islands. He was captivated by their tranquillity and magic gaining a profound knowledge of the archipelago that he published in the eight volume series Die Liparischen Inseln between 1893 and 1896 in which he documented his trips to the Aeolian Islands and in particular his love for Lipari. Archduke Ludwig appreciated the Aeolian cuisine and traditions so much that he described them in detail in his travel diaries that were also an expression of his fascination for the manners of the Aeolian islanders and the ancient roots of the islands. An excellent Italian version of Ludwig Salvator's volumes edited by Pino Paino was published by Edinixe Editrice, Centro Studi Eoliani, Lipari, between 1977 and 1985.

The volumes he published provide an excellent documentation of how life was on the islands just before the beginning of their decline. Illustrated with a magnificent set of lithographs, they depict the topography of the islands and record every aspect of their life and culture. At a time when getting about in the islands was not easy – it was either the case of walking everywhere or hiring a sceccu (donkey) for 70 cents a day (1 lira 40 if the donkey man also came along) – he was able to visit each island in a capillary fashion describing in meticulous detail the customs, the dress, the artefacts, the implements, the dialect, even the proverbs and the songs. His books provide a collection of all the things that in years to come the descendants of emigrants could use to support the romantic belief that their forbears had lived in an Arcadian paradise where everything was pure, simple and wholesome, a perspective interestingly enough found to some extent in the reminiscences of the three Bonicas expressed in the excerpts present in this anthology.

Ludwig's volume on Filicudi is smaller than the ones on most of the other islands and focuses almost exclusively on the flora, fauna, geology and topography of the island. There is hardly anything about the people, the language, the cuisine and the traditions, perhaps in the belief that they had much in common with what he had written about the other islands. Nevertheless the stunning detailed sketches he drew not only with words but also in ink or pencil which were later transformed into the lithographs included in the book, provide graphic pictures of what Filicudi looked like at the time – not only varied aspects of the landscape but also the small settlement

at Pecorini Mare, the church at Val di Chiesa, the inside of a single room dwelling at Piano di Porto with its soppalco (mezzanine), panca (bench) and high iron bed.

On a few occasions however he provides some glimpses of the Filicudari and their day to day activities such as in Chapter 2 where he briefly describes the women at Ficarrisi spinning quickly away at their looms while their husbands are intent on gathering bundles of ginestra used to heat the ovens. He also mentions the few houses at Ficarrisi which he considers surprisingly dirty and in contrast with respect with the cleanliness found elsewhere on the island. It can be noted en passant that the architecture of the Ficarrisi houses was somewhat rougher than that of the houses in the other neighbourhoods of Filicudi, a difference in all probability due to the fact that Ficarrisi was populated in past centuries by shepherds from Sicily who had been sent there to look after sheep belonging to the Franciscan monastery of Lipari.

[insert picture here]

House at Piano di Porto

The excerpt presented here in English translation is the first chapter of Ludwig's book that provides an initial general though detailed description of the island as he travels across its landscape, a description that he then develops with further details in the following chapters.

Excerpts from *Die Liparischen Inseln. Fünftes Heft: Filicuri* (Druck und Verlag von Henier Mercy, Prague, 1895), pp. 1-10¹

ARCHDUKE LUDWIG SALVATOR OF AUSTRIA

Filicuri², 9 km and 5463 are square, rises in the west at some distance from Salina. It is made up of a single cone 773.71 metres high and presents various lateral elevations among which the most prominent is the small 173.57 high peninsular of Capu Grazianu to the southeast.

The island, like Alicuri [Alicudi] that it resembles closely in the nature of its terrain and in every other aspect, is sharply different from the other Lipari Islands. It cannot be said that it is rich in vegetation. The terrain is prevalently made up of porous augite-andesite of a black and reddish colour, with numerous porous copper-coloured scorias, sometimes of a basaltic nature, or of fragmented augite-andesite in sparkling granules.

¹ Translation by Gaetano Rando.

² In a number of cases the spellings adopted by Ludwig Salvator are different from contemporary spellings and most probably reflect pronunciation variants of the late 19th century. They have been left as they appear in the original.

The vegetation that grows spontaneously on this island does not present any sort of tree with the exception of a few carob and olive trees. However there is a variety of flora, so much so that I was able to identify the following examples:

Achillea ligustica, *Anagallis arvensis*, *Artemisia arborescens*, *Asparagus acutifolius*, *Brassica fruticulosa*, *Cistus incanus*, *C. Monspeliensis*, *C. Salvifolius*, *Chondrilla juncea*, *Chrozophora tinctoria*, *Clematis vitalba*, *Convolvulus althaeoides*, *Cytisus sp.*, *Daphne gnidium*, *Echium sp.*, *Erica arborea*, *Erythraea Centaureum*, *Ferula communis*, *Honiga maritima*, *Hypericum hircinum*, *H. perforatum*, *Inula viscosa*, *Lactuca soligna*, *Linaria spuria*, *Lonicera implexa*, *Parietaria officinalis*, *Passerina hirsute*, *Pistacia lentiscus*, *Plantago sp.*, *Polygonum convolvulus*, *P. aviculare*, *Portulacae aoleracea*, *Pteris aquiline*, *Pulicaria dysenterica*, *Salsola Kali*, *Satureia Nepeta*, *Senecio squalidus*, *S. cineraria*, *Spartium junceum*, *Vicia pseudocracea*.

[insert picture here]

The landing at Picurini

All things considered, the most secure landing place of Filicuri is Picurini which is well enough protected from the north winds. Boats, vats and other equipment belonging to the fishermen from Milazzo who come to the island frequently are lined up along the pebbly beach. Also many fish traps and lobsterpots can be noted that however belong to the islanders. Picurini consists of a modest group of houses. In one of these a cooper plies his trade. Two farmers' houses a bit higher up have superb pergolas of *Livedda*, very fleshy black grapes. A track that is by no means narrow climbs from Picurini right up to the church. Once past Vadduni e Picurini with its overhanging rocks of grey lava pointing towards Muntagna and rocks covered with prickly pear on both sides, the track winds steeply between rocky boulders. The slope that extends towards the sea side gradually becomes flatter and is sub-divided in terraces where wheat is grown. Among the roundish rust-coloured boulders that can be seen higher up, almost smothered in prickly pear, grow plum trees, capers, thistles and lush carob trees. Barley and wheat are grown on the terraces above, where the track goes inland, which are supported by walls of reddish rocks and delimited along the track by lower walls.

After getting past the Vadduni, the track on the left goes to Cuntrata o Stimpagnatu where there are a few houses. In front of one of the houses two lush palm trees grow, while age-old olive trees vegetate in the narrow terraces. Near these houses *Solanum Sodomaeum* plants are present – the seeds were imported from Rinella di Salina. The site above, where ruins of a building can be seen, is called Cuntrata e Liepri, the one higher up is called a Muntagnola, and the one to the east a Costa e Pagghiara. The track on the right goes to Cuntrata e Canali and then crossing Cuntrata i l'Oranu, to the Punta of the same name, on whose slopes, divided into narrow terraces, wheat seems to be grown. Grasses are scattered on the land on the hillside.

On the slope there are a few white houses with *luoggi* (pergolas) supported by round whitewashed columns (*pulera*). In front of one of these houses, next to a lush palm tree, grow pomegranate and apricot trees. This place is called Fussetta. The highest crest of Punta i l'Oranu is called Sierru i Canali. Some houses have whitewashed octagonal columns, above which are superb *luoggi* bearing age-old vines that sometimes produce very big grapes called *Trummana*. Next to the houses there are the usual spherical ovens. Going through a slight depression called Casci i Mura, divided by a dry stone wall, a track to the right goes to some larger terraces. The rocks above are dominated by prickly pears. The terrain is made up of an earthy conglomerate mixed with hard stones. The track on the left goes, a little further on, to the nearby Munti Palmieri, while on the right there is a farmer's house with a lush palm tree next to it. To get to this place the track crosses large terraces where barley is grown. On the

right another track goes to Cuntrata i Rocca e Ciauli that lies behind the first ridge of Punta i l'Oranu.

Looking up, the houses at Turriuni can be seen, and also the other houses at Canali, a little further back. The terraces, sometimes beans are grown there, tend to become smaller towards the summit where the terrain, increasingly rocky, becomes compact glassy lava. After crossing a saddle called a Purtedda, the track goes between two reliefs, Turriuni on the right and Sierra e Macchi on the left. On the slopes to the left of the hill, lush with prickly pears and olive trees, there are a few small farmers' whitewashed houses with pergola and an aedicule (wayside shrine) with an arched ceiling accessible by climbing up a few steps that contains a rough image of the Holy Family.

The narrow track that goes past the side of the aedicule climbs up to Munti Palmieri. On the left slopes grow *Prieuli* vines and numerous young mulberry trees that were planted a few years previously when there was an unsuccessful attempt to cultivate silkworms. In the distance towards the left Sierru i Rannu can be seen. From its terraces planted with vines, a watercourse winds its way between dry stone walls. The track on the right goes to Cuntrada o Lisciu. Not far from there, marked by some terraces mainly planted with vines begins the descent of Vaddi a Criesia, while on the slopes, called Cuosti a Vaddi a Criesia, there is the church of Santu Stefanu that will be discussed below. Copious *Heeliotropium europaeum* plants grow among the rocks.

Leaving the church and the track that goes to Zuccu Ranni on the right, there is a narrow track to the left that, after crossing Vaddi a Criesia, goes down a gentle slope planted with wheat. The valley is cut in half by Vadduni a Fossa that goes right down to the sea and thus must be crossed. It appears to be deeply marked on the high part and at its edges there is a copious growth of small broom bushes. Reeds grow on the bank of another small watercourse that winds its way into the main *Vadduni*. From this point there is a stupendous view of the church and the sea. Fig trees also grow in the Vadduni a Fossa and higher up, near Passu e Viti, vines are grown in the watercourse bed. The pass that must be crossed is called in fact *Passu e Viti*. Then the *Vadduni* becomes a chasm and takes on the name of Sutta a Ribba.

[insert picture here]

The church of Santo Stefano

After passing through the second valley the track climbs through vineyards over terrain consisting of a reddish yellow conglomerate, mixed with reddish and blackish stones. The vineyards go right up to the top of the Muntagna. They are planted with isolated low vines and are not cultivated with *Prieuli* vines but produce black grapes and only rarely white grapes that are certainly more exquisite. *Passulina* grapes are not grown on the island except sporadically on the southern-most slopes. Here there are also white figs. Except for a few twists and turns the track proceeds straight through the rocks, crossing soft conglomerates on which huge masses of lava rocks are occasionally scattered.

Behind the Jazzera height on the right there is a new track that goes back to the church. On the saddle towards north there is a limitless view of the sea with Struognuli [Stromboli] in the distance, and of slopes planted with vineyards towards the south and of the promontory with the church and its slopes, that become ever steeper, from which Capu Grazianu with its blackish hues emerges.

Leaving the track on the right that crosses Via a Funtana, one climbs up the steep slope that goes to a Muntagna, flanked by numerous briars and wild rose bushes. Then one proceeds gropingly along the slopes of Ribbi Russi a Muntagna made up of

an earthy reddish conglomerate on which thistles and other plants, particularly broom, are scattered. The slopes facing the south are cultivated with low *Prieuli* vines.

From the height of Ribbi Russi, 673 metres above sea level, one arrives at the summit of a Muntagna, whose aspect is somewhat uniform. It appears at first covered by thistles and briars, while at the top it is completely bare of vegetation, despite its earthy soil. On the northern slope of the ridge, made up of a very narrow saddle, the Vadduni e Curdunedda goes down all the way to the sea. On the southern slope, between a Muntagnola and the roundish Munti Palmieri, terraced on the lower parts and cultivated with vines right up to the summit, runs the Vadduni e Pacci with its always equal ridges.

The principal promontory of a Muntagna rises in the direction of Capu Grazianu. On the slope between the first rise and the Signali, there is the Binifiziu ridge and right on the Punta rises Timpuni a Fossa. The triangulation mark that, as already mentioned, is situated at 773.71 metres above sea level is called U Telegrafu by the local *contadini* (farmers). La Fossa e Filici is a trigonometrically determined point set at 38° 34' 23" northern latitude and at 0° 57' 52" eastern latitude from Monte Mario. Rocks covered by thick briar bushes are scattered all over the summit and on the slope that descends towards the south modest terraced fields where barley is grown can be noted.

The promontory that stretches in the direction of Alicuri is covered with grey roundish rocks carpeted with greenish lichens. Many briar bushes, the odd isolated strawberry tree and *Daphne gnidium* grow there. From here there is a steep descent on the left of which, towards the south, there are the completely terraced slopes of a Muntagnola. On the right, looking towards north, extends a mountainous rise that tends to become wider, according to uncertain extensions of the terrain, in the direction of Ficarrisi towards the sea. The landscape per se is cold and bare but it is revived by the stimulating contrast of the warmer colours of the sea that extends to the horizon towards the north and partially towards the east. Compact rocks, that are also roundish, mark the rocky wall higher up.

The whole slope, from here right to the far slope facing Ficarrisi, is thickly covered by briars and ferns. The attempts to grow wheat there have always given very poor results, both because of the excessive height and the *lupara* [buckshot wind]. Following on there is a saddleback that becomes increasingly earthy. The *muro a secco* that rises nearby, towards the north, was built specifically to create a provident shelter for the boys that bring cattle to pasture here on windy days. On the left there is a not too clean rainwater well whose mouth is guarded by a few rocks.

After going past the well and proceeding along the ridge in the direction of Siccagni, one can enjoy a stupendous view of Alicuri in the distance, of the prominent Munti Nassàru, of the upright Canna and of the other nearby rocks near the shore. On the right the isolated houses of Ficarrisi are visible and before them the high rocks of u Timpuni o Faragghiuni. The slopes appear to be generally bare with only patches of sporadic clumps of grass here and there. From the almost rocky extremity thickly covered by briar bushes a good view of the Faragghiuni and of the shore below can be enjoyed. The track then continues down to the Faragghiuni and at its foot there is a different track that we will describe shortly. The view that you get from here of the entire Muntagna with the sea in the background is superb. From the same slope it is possible to see Struognuli (Stromboli) in the distance, Panaria, Salina, Lipari, Vurcanieddu (Vulcanello) and part of Vurcanu [Vulcano].

At the foot of the rocky ridge, all round the Muntagna, a track twists and turns and another track branches off going half way up the slope, just above the modest Vadduni a Contrata o Binifizio, scattered with isolated vines. On the sides unexpected chasms open up in the soft earthy conglomerate. The Vadduni is covered with beds of reeds, thistles, broom, and copious briar bushes. From this crag the first part of which is called Sierru e Macchi, the track proceeds almost in a straight line across a reddish terrain, along the incline of a Muntagna cultivated mainly with low vines. Thistles and

other common grasses also grow there. In the distance rises the peninsula of Capu Grazianu that, reaching out into the sea, forms a splendid inlet with its gracious shape.

The track then proceeds among reddish deposits of volcanic rubble along the ridge of the Muntagna and on the left a little track branches off that goes to Portedda. Then it weaves through the vineyards in the direction of Vadduni e Pacci and it follows the view of the rocky and terraced cliffs of the Muntagna then it goes down again to where one can see a little house at the bottom of the valley. The slopes, although divided into terraces, don't seem to be delimited by dry stone walls. Here, the Muntagna joins the promontory of Munti Palmieri almost seeming to choke the throat of the valley. In the direction of the Vadduni that at this point tends to become wider, one can enjoy a fine view of the Muntagna with its terraced slopes. Other terraced slopes can also be noted on both sides of the Vadduni e Pacci. The little house at the bottom of the Vadduni o Sautu with the well next to it was built by a priest about fifty years ago. On the sides and down below, isolated olive trees grow. Then the track crosses a conglomerate of volcanic stones on which lava rocks of notable size are scattered.

From Munti Palmieri where copious prickly pears are cultivated, one can enjoy a superb view of the saddle that separates a Muntagna from Muntagnola in the direction of the limitless sea and of the severe outline of rocky Alicuri. Just as beautiful is the view that opens up of the rest of Punta i l'Oranu and of Capu Grazianu. Among the prickly pears one can observe that some are particularly spikey. These are usually used to fence off one piece of land from another. Olive trees and carob trees and isolated Scylla plants can also be noted here. Then the track goes into an area which has a different aspect where some side tracks lead to individual houses.

Proceeding towards the inner side of the Vadduni one gets to Contrada i Silvestru. Numerous olive trees grow on the slopes, in the same way as they do on the terrace of the Muntagnola, which are also cultivated with low *Prieuli* vines.

The track on the left goes to Canali while the other track discussed earlier, finishes up at Picurini.